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Bare Naked Beginnings

Carol Neumann

I opened my eyes and rubbed them with my hands. I could see the light coming in through the window between the bars of my crib. I rolled over and looked at the big bed across the room. My Mumma wasn't in it, so I cried for her. She didn't come so I sat up and called her.

"Mumma. Mumma."

But it was Daddy that entered the room, not Mumma. He was dressed in his overalls and had a special smile for me. He held his hands behind his back, laughing.

"Tut, tut, tut," he clucked his tongue. "Don't cry, Cookie. I have something for you."

Mumma ran into the room in a flowery dress and stood just behind him. She smiled at me and looked at Daddy.

"C'mon George, don't tease."

Daddy pulled his arm around and pushed something in my face. It was a dolly. I grabbed her with both hands and hugged her. She was darker than my other dollies and she had on a bright dress, the color of dandelions. I loved her right away.

"She's a nigger doll," said Daddy.

"Nigger doll," I thought about my dollies. Now I had Cutie, Susie Ann, and Nigger Doll.

It was my first birthday. I didn't know it at the time. But I knew that I was Cookie and that Mumma and Daddy loved me, as did the other kids.

Daddy picked me up and carried me through the pantry. I noticed the cookie jar as we passed. It was my favorite part of the pantry. It had a big flower on the front.

"Cookie?" I asked.

"No, no. It's your birthday. We'll have cake."

"Cookie, cookie." I cried.

"Oh, give her one George. It's her birthday," said Mumma.

Daddy opened the jar and pulled one out. I grabbed it with both hands and sucked on it. It was sweet and made my mouth feel wet and happy.

"Cookie?" I held it up to give Mumma a bite.

Mumma nibbled the edge and said, "Tank-ou."

I laughed and wiggled to get loose from Daddy. He carried me into the kitchen and put me down on the hard floor. I grabbed a chair and pulled myself up. I looked

up at the big red pump.

"Wa-wa?"

Daddy pulled the long handle up and down until the water began to stream out of the pump. He filled my cup and handed it to me. The water was cool on my lips and my mouth felt good.

I could hear the sounds of the other kids outside and I wanted to go out, but Mumma grabbed me and lay me down to change my diaper. As soon as she had the diaper off, as she reached for the clean one, I got up and ran out the back door onto the porch.

"Cookie?" I could hear Mumma chasing after me. I scrambled down the porch steps and ran out onto the driveway. The big black car was parked in front of the garage. I ran around it and sat on the running board on the other side facing the barn. My bare butt felt warm from the hot car. I giggled in the sunshine, free and happy.

"Where's Cookie?" I could hear Mumma but I couldn't see her. I giggled some more. She found me, snatched me up and brought me back into the house.

"Big girls don't go outside bare naked," she said.

I wondered why.

Supper was a big deal that night. My birthday cake was in the middle of the table. Everybody laughed over Nigger Doll.

"Just like Beulah," said my brother Jimmy. I had heard Beulah on the radio.

They didn't laugh like that about Susie Ann and Cutie.

My high chair was pushed up to the table by my plate with the birdie on it. I picked up my spoon and stuck it in the 'tatoes.

"Did you see Cookie outside bare naked?" asked Mumma.

"I did," said Chi-Chi. "She was sitting on the running board, hiding."

"Naughty girl," said my brother Ritchie.

"Tut, tut. She's just a baby," said Daddy.

I thought I was a big girl.

After supper, there was fire on the cake and singing and soon it was time to go to bed.

I lay in my crib with my girlie blanket and wondered about things. Then, I hugged Cutie and Susie Ann and Nigger Doll and dreamed about running bare naked in the driveway, laughing.

It is the first day of my life that I remember, maybe because of things I didn't understand.